

pension plans throughout the country. These pension plans were maintained by companies in the troubled steel and airline industries.

For all these reasons and more, we know that Congress must act on pension reform legislation so employees can continue to count on the retirement security provided by employer-sponsored pension plans. That is why Senate Democrats strongly supported pension reform legislation and were eager to go to conference on this bill. We recognize this is an important bill and strongly believe the Senate and House must get to work immediately to hammer out the compromises necessary to produce a final bill.

Senators agree. I think, from our perspective, we are united, Democrats and Republicans. Senate Democrats believe we can and should name conferees right now, this morning, and send the bill to the House so they can name their conferees. Nevertheless, some recent press reports on the status of the pension reform bill have suggested that Democrats are preventing this bill from moving to conference.

I wish to take a few minutes and correct this record. We strongly support the improvements this legislation will bring to our private pension system. We support improvements this legislation will bring, improvements to our private pension system. We want to improve pension funding so employees will know their employer's pension promise will be fulfilled. Democrats believe it is important to provide certainty to employers who are trying to plan their pension costs. Democrats believe it is important to clarify the rules governing cash balance pension plans so older workers are protected. Democrats believe it is important we act quickly to provide relief to those airlines that want to maintain their pension plans but need some time to recover from the downturn following the attacks of 9/11. Democrats believe it is imperative that we shore up the finances of the PBGC.

In other words, Democrats want this bill to go to conference today, and we can do that if the majority will agree to a reasonable number of conferees. Throughout this process, Senate Democrats have worked closely with Republicans to move pension reform legislation in an expedited manner. The pension reform bill was reported by the Finance Committee by voice vote on July 26 of last year. The HELP Committee reported the bill on September 28 by a vote of 18 to 2. After consideration, the two committee bills had to be reconciled into one proposal. Senators ENZI, GRASSLEY, KENNEDY, and BAUCUS worked long and hard on a bipartisan basis to produce that legislation. At each step during this process, Democrats worked with the Republicans to produce a bipartisan bill.

When it came time to consider the bill on the Senate floor, Democrats again worked to move this legislation forward. Senate Democrats worked

with the majority leader to reach agreement on a limited number of amendments. Democrats also worked to limit debate so the bill could move forward. Democrats did not have to forego their rights to offer amendments to the pension bill, but we did. Democrats didn't have to forego their rights to debate issues raised by this legislation, but we did. There are any number of steps that can be taken to slow down the progress of legislation if a Member of the Senate is so inclined. Democrats have not chosen to take any of these steps and are not choosing to take any of these steps now.

We are eager to go to conference on this legislation and we are not contesting the Republicans' desire to have a two-vote advantage in the conference. The majority leader set the margin at 7 to 5. We believe fairness is 8 to 6. All we are asking is that each committee which is a party to this legislation be adequately represented. We believe that appointing 14 conferees in a ratio of 8 to 6 gives the Senate the best opportunity to bring back a bill from the conference that will garner strong support by the Senate.

The majority leader has said he will go 9 to 6. That is not fair, to have a three-vote advantage. I urge the majority to consider its opposition to our very reasonable request so we can get to work on this legislation. Together we can improve our Nation's pension system and make America better.

Mr. President, simply it is this: Are we going to go to conference on this bill? We want to go. Arbitrarily, the majority leader said it will be a 7-to-5 ratio. We wanted 8 to 6. We will go to conference right now. It doesn't seem fair. We are not holding up the conference. We are not holding up the conference as indicated by the fact that we are willing to go from 7 to 5 to 8 to 6.

The distinguished Senator from Tennessee comes back with the suggestion that, well, we will go 9 to 6. That isn't fair. We want to go to conference, but we want at least to have a semblance of fairness. We are willing to go with the two-vote margin but not three votes.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 1 hour, the first half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee and the second half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee.

The Senator from Missouri.

ORDER FOR FILING DEADLINE

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the filing deadline for first-degree amendments to S. 2271 occur at 12 noon today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE PATRIOT ACT

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to speak about the war on terror, progress in Iraq, and the PATRIOT Act. In spite of the negative press you see on the nightly news, Iraq is progressing toward the goal of being independent, free, and democratic. It has been nearly 3 years since our brave men and women in the military and our other agencies freed a people from the grip of a tyrannical and murderous dictator and began to work to establish a democratic society in the heart of the Middle East. In doing so, they are also making the world and all of us much safer.

Since then, the people of Iraq have set up a constitutional government and braved death by voting in free elections.

Surely more remains to be done, but let there be no doubt, progress is being made. But challenges remain. We recognize that and we must.

The recent bombing of a mosque in Samarra has highlighted the challenges Iraq continues to face. Who did it?

Following the attack, a prominent Iraqi Shiite cleric, al-Sistani, recognizing the hallmarks of al-Qaida, called, for the first time, for street demonstrations against the bombing, and thousands of his angry supporters protested, shouting slogans against al-Qaida and its supporters, accusing them of fueling hatred and violence, which is surely what they did.

News of the attack only underscores why we are in Iraq and what is at stake. When our delegation met with Sunni, Shiite, and Kurd leaders last month in Baghdad, those leaders recognized, as our able Ambassador emphasized, the dangers of sectarian violence. They committed to work together, knowing that they have to bring about a national unity government.

Recent news reports suggest that with the intervention of enlightened leaders such as al-Sistani, people are beginning to work together again. But the disturbing news of the bombing of the mosque and resulting reactions and killings simply seems to embolden all the hand-wringing naysayers who have incessantly talked of civil war in Iraq and American withdrawal. A greater lesson, however, lies within this tragic development.

Simply put, what is the alternative?

Is America to retreat from Iraq and simply seek to be left alone and leave the world's problems to others to fix?

In the age of bin Laden, al-Zarqawi, and al-Sistani, that is a course America and the world cannot afford to take. We should have learned our lesson on 9/11.

As the Wall Street Journal recently pointed out, the fact is that under the Bush administration's policy, four democratic governments have come to power in the Middle East—Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and Palestine. Yes these democracies will face serious challenges along the way, from insurgents to bloody ethnic feuding.

These are very serious challenges, and we are witnessing these challenges right now.

Let us be blunt. There is always the possibility that a murderous dictator can come to power in a democracy. That is how Hitler got in, in Germany. No one said this approach is perfect. It isn't, especially when Hamas wins in Palestine. But democracy isn't supposed to be perfect or easy or smooth. It was not such as we set up our Government.

But what is the alternative to promoting democracy, no matter how great the challenges become? I submit there is no viable alternative. It is democracy, and only democracy, that will offer these countries the possibility of greater civic freedoms, greater economic freedoms, and the hope for a politically moderate future.

It is only because of American leadership, our brave soldiers, our brave civilians, and the hopeful leadership, the enlightened leadership of people such as Hamid Karzai, Jalal Talabani, and Saad Hariiri that these countries and their people stand a chance of a better life and the world stands a chance to be a safer place. Along with it, America stands a chance of having important friends in a part of the world that in the past has been no friend to America.

Some of my colleagues have said we need to get out of Iraq. I agree—as soon as we train the Iraqi military and the police to ensure security but not until that is done.

But even when Iraq is stabilized, we will continue to see the threat of violence from the Islamofascists such as al-Qaida, Ansar al-Islam, Jamia Islamia.

As President Bush warned, this is going to be a decade-long war. Thus, our battles will go on overseas to deny foreign safe havens to murderous terrorist groups.

At home, the threat is still grim. And with recent disclosures, regrettably, of our most sensitive intelligence, according to CIA Director Porter Goss, we have experienced very severe damage to our capabilities.

It is even more important now that we provide our domestic law enforcement agencies the tools they need. That is why it is imperative we pass the PATRIOT Act as soon as possible. It is past time that we do so. 9/11 was not so long ago that we should have forgotten what it felt like that day.

You know and I know what it was like. We all need to remember. The results of hamstringing our domestic intelligence abilities are not so distant. The reasons we passed the PATRIOT Act have not gone away.

I am glad that an overwhelming number of Senators will join together to provide our terror fighters with the tools they need. For those for whom this was a hard decision, I applaud your courage. However, our actions pale in comparison to the courage exercised by those of us who protect us every day. It is to them we give these

tools, to them we entrust our safety, to them we owe our freedoms, to them we owe our lives.

Why would we not give them the tools they need to hold terror at bay? Why should we slow their hunt for terror suspects here at home? Why would we take from them the tools that have aided in the capture of over 400 terrorist suspects?

Renewing the PATRIOT Act will do this and more. It strikes a balance between national security and personal liberties. In the words of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, it is a better bill now than it was before.

Negotiators have addressed many concerns. A balance has been struck on national security letters. Nondisclosure requirements prevent terrorists from learning the progress of investigations and investigative techniques. New language allows recipients of NSL letters to overturn the nondisclosure requirements, if a judge finds there is no reason to believe that disclosures may endanger the national security of the United States, interfere with criminal, counterterrorism or counterintelligence investigation, interfere with diplomatic relations or endanger the life or physical safety of any person.

Could we allow anything else?

Language was added clarifying that libraries, where functioning in their traditional roles, are not subject to national security letters. The agreement removes the requirement that a person inform the FBI of the identity of any attorney to whom disclosure was made or will be made to obtain legal advice or assistance.

For those of us who care about port security—quite a few people have been talking about it—this legislation includes the Reducing Crime and Terrorism at America's Seaports Act of 2005.

Those who join me in supporting this measure will make it a Federal crime to use fraud or false pretenses to enter America's ports; establish a new, general Federal crime to interfere forcibly with inspections of vessels by Federal law enforcement or resist arrest or provide law enforcement officers with false information; add "passenger vessels" to the forms of mass transit protected against terrorist attacks under Federal law; make it a Federal crime to place any substance or device in the navigable waters of the United States with the intent to damage a vessel or its cargo or to interfere with maritime commerce; and make it a Federal crime to transport explosives, biological, chemical, radioactive weapons or nuclear material aboard a vessel in the United States, in waters subject to U.S. jurisdiction on the high seas or aboard a vessel of the United States.

In addition, I care very deeply about fighting the drug scourge sweeping rural America, especially in the Midwest. Folks in my State know all too well that methamphetamine is perhaps the most deadly, fiercely addictive, and rapidly spreading drug the United

States has known. It is cheap, potent, and available everywhere.

During the past decade, while law enforcement officers continue to bust record numbers of clandestine labs, methamphetamine use in some communities has increased by as much as 300 percent.

The PATRIOT Act reauthorization includes the most comprehensive antimeth package ever introduced in the Congress by my colleagues Senator JIM TALENT of Missouri and Senator DIANNE FEINSTEIN of California. This Combat Meth Act will make certain legitimate consumers have access to the medicine they need while cutting off the meth cooks from the large amounts of ingredients they need to cook meth.

For all of these reasons, we must reauthorize the PATRIOT Act now. Our terror fighters cannot wait, our ports cannot wait, and our communities suffering from the scourge of meth cannot wait.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Nevada is recognized.

MILITARY RECRUITERS

Mr. ENSIGN. Mr. President, I rise to speak about a very important issue—access for our military recruiters on our high school campuses.

Later today, I will introduce a resolution in support of our military recruiters.

I rise and stand here today in a country free from tyranny, free from dictatorship, and free from oppression. I stand here today protected by the rights that are guaranteed to me by the Constitution of the United States. I am free to stand here because I am protected by the men and women of our nation's Armed Forces. It is because of our Nation's military that I enjoy the freedoms that are laid out in our country's Constitution.

These freedoms are enjoyed by every citizen of this great country.

The No Child Left Behind Act contains a provision that provides military recruiters and college and university recruiters with access to some student information. The intent behind this provision was to ensure that military recruiters were put on a level playing field with recruiters from our Nation's colleges and universities. At the time this language was included in NCLB military recruiters across the country were being denied access to student information that college and university recruiters were given full access to.

The text contained in No Child Left Behind is very simple. It states that "each local educational agency receiving assistance under this Act shall provide, on a request made by military recruiters or an institution of higher education, access to secondary school students' names, addresses, and telephone listings."

Recently, there have been numerous news reports on this topic. The debate